



Lost River & Shortnose Sucker

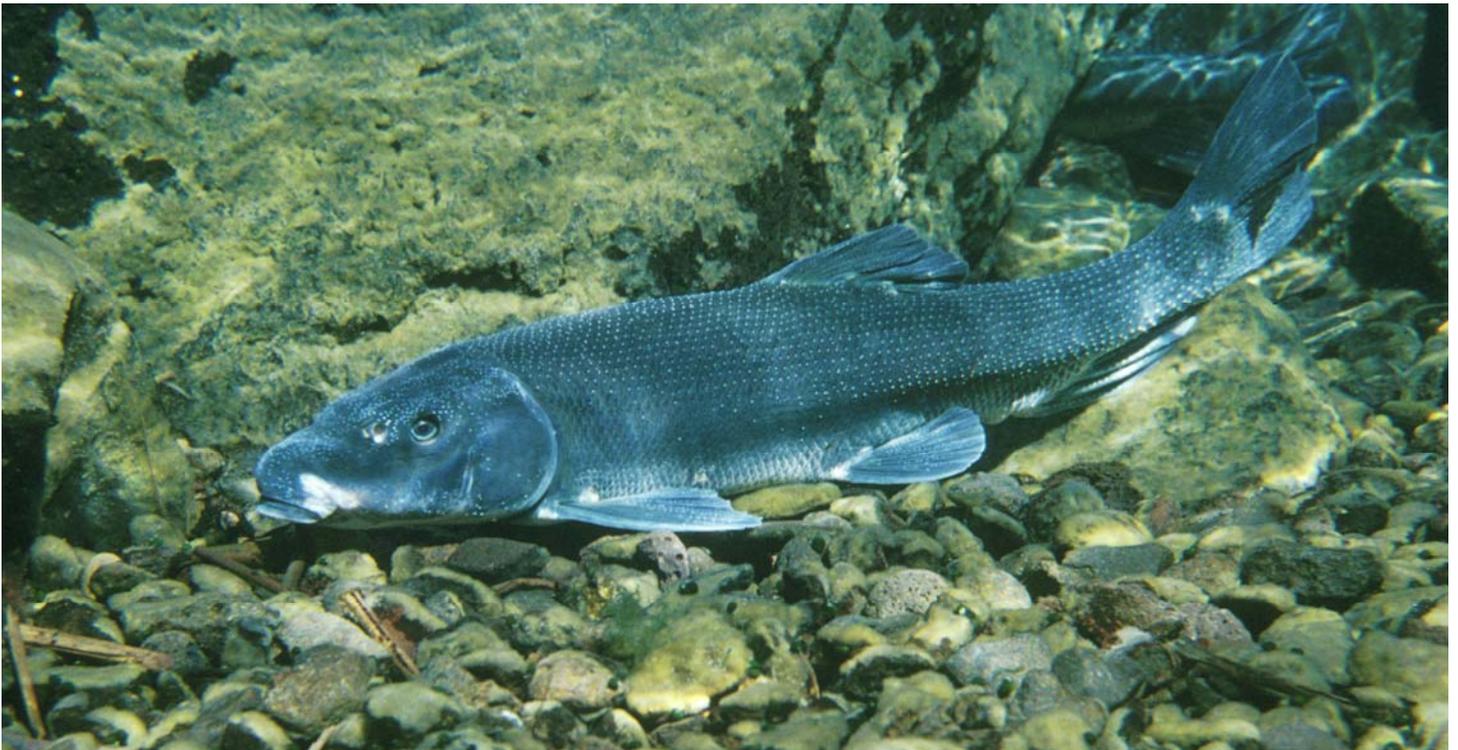
(Deltistes luxatus & Chasmistes brevirostris)

Both the Lost River sucker (*C'waam*) and shortnose sucker (*Qapdo*) are large, long-lived freshwater fish found exclusively in the Klamath Basin. Both fish were once a valuable source of food and oil and are considered sacred by the Basin's Native American tribes.

These fish were federally listed as endangered in 1988. A recovery plan was published in 1993.

Historical Information: Early records indicate these fish were once widespread and abundant in the upper Klamath Basin of Oregon and California. This area historically contained over 350,000 acres of wet-lands and flood-plains. These areas protected sucker habitat by controlling erosion, recycling organic and inorganic nutrients, and maintaining water quality.

Because suckers were historically very abundant, they were a major food source for the Klamath and Modoc Indians and local settlers in the late 1800's. Canneries were established along the Lost River to process suckers into oil, dried fish, and other products.



Agricultural development and associated water and land use changes in the basin have contributed to the significant loss of wetland habitat and a significant decline in sucker populations. Although overharvesting and pollution may have played a role in the species

decline, it is believed that the combined effects of the construction of dams, the draining or dredging of lakes, and other alterations of natural stream flow have reduced the reproductive success of shortnose and Lost River suckers by as much as 95 percent

through the degradation of suitable breeding habitat.

At the time the suckers were listed as endangered, it was noted that there had been no significant addition of young into the population in 18 years.

Description and Life History: Locally known as mullet, the Lost River sucker can reach 39 inches and lives as long as 45 years. The shortnose sucker can reach 20 inches and lives as long as 33 years. Both species live in quiet lake waters most of the year and migrate up fast moving streams in the spring to spawn. Once the eggs hatch, the larval fish begin their migration back to calmer waters. They generally migrate at night and stay in shallow, shoreline areas and in aquatic vegetation during the day.

Diet: Lost River suckers have unique, triangular-shaped gill structures which are used to strain a diet of zooplankton, algae and larval insects - mostly midges - that are abundant in the area. Shortnose suckers feed primarily on zooplankton (tiny floating aquatic animals), known as Daphnia.

Distribution: The present distribution of the Lost River and shortnose suckers include Upper Klamath Lake and its tributaries, Clear Lake Reservoir and its tributaries, Tule Lake and the Lost River up to Anderson-Rose dam, the Klamath River downstream to Copco Reservoir. The shortnose sucker is also found in Gerber Reservoir and its tributaries.



Reasons for Decline: Although a number of factors have contributed to the decline of the suckers, habitat degradation is considered the primary cause. Other factors have led to increases in stream temperatures, high levels of nutrients (which encourages the buildup of excess algae and bacteria), and serious erosion and sedimentation problems in streams. Such water quality problems have reduced the availability of suitable sucker habitat and have resulted in major fish mortality. Entire age classes of young suckers are routinely lost due to poor water quality conditions. As a result, few young suckers survive to sexual maturity, and therefore, do not increase the population size. Other factors affecting the decline include predation and competition from native and non-native fishes such as largemouth bass, blue chub, yellow perch, fathead minnows, and rainbow trout.

Conservation Measures: Conservation efforts for the shortnose and Lost River suckers focus on the re-establishment of a more naturally functioning ecosystem in the Klamath Basin. Fencing portions of streams to reduce cattle-caused erosion, replanting stream banks with native vegetation, improving forestry and agricultural practices, and assuring adequate water levels in reservoirs will contribute to the recovery of this species. Through coordination of the actions of land use agencies and private landowners, further degradation of sucker habitat can be avoided and steps can be taken to improve current conditions. By minimizing the impacts of future modifications to spawning habitat and restoring waters to a more natural state, recovery of Lost River and shortnose sucker populations is possible in the Klamath Basin.



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